

MAY / 2019

Soviet Anti-Zionism and Contemporary Left Antisemitism

by Izabella Tabarovsky



Anti-Zionist caricature from the Soviet magazine, Krokodil, 1972. Reddit.

For many decades, virulently antisemitic forms of ‘anti-Zionism’ were central to the cold war propaganda of the Communist states. In this powerful essay Izabella Tabarovsky not only lays bare the entire shameful story of Soviet Judeophobia but shows us that, to quote William Faulkner, ‘the past is not dead, it is not even past’.

INTRODUCTION



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INTRODUCTION

In 1985, the KGB-supervised [Anti-Zionist Committee of the Soviet Public](#), known by its Russian acronym as AKSO, issued a brochure, [Criminal Alliance of Zionism and Nazism](#).^[i] The brochure reported on a press conference that the Committee had held some months earlier. The site for the press conference, the press center of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, indicated the official blessing of the messages AKSO had to deliver. The brochure was translated into English and distributed abroad by Novosti Press Agency, a news service and a major source of Soviet foreign propaganda.

A propagandistic document reporting on a propaganda conference, it painted a harrowing picture of Zionism. Senior members of the committee, whom were prominent Soviet Jews (an intentional choice meant to deflect accusations of antisemitism) claimed to have proof of Zionist co-operation with the Nazis. They depicted the process of Nazi expansionism, accused them of falsely inflating the scale of antisemitism and Jewish victimhood in World War II, and claimed an agreement that permitted the transfer of 60,000 German Jews to the East, it 'easier for the Nazis to unleash World War II.' They claimed that Zionists colluded 'in the genocide against the "Slavs, Jews and Gypsies in Europe"'. Speakers concluded by rejecting, in advance, any attempt by the press to represent the committee's assertions as antisemitic or anti-Jewish; and promised that Zionism would never suffer from the 'historical reality' of cooperation between the Zionists and the Nazis.

The brochure might have read as a shocking smear that distorted history had it not been an integral part of a massive Soviet anti-Zionist campaign that entered a particularly active stage in 1967. Its language reflects its epoch – one marked by Cold War tensions, propagandistic jargon that permeated all aspects of Soviet public life, and virulent demonisation of Israel and Zionism. Alleged Zionist-Nazi collaboration and false equivalence between the two were among the campaign's centerpieces.

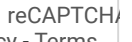
Designed by the KGB and overseen by chief Communist Party ideologues, the campaign had achieved numerous successes. For a significant portion of domestic and some foreign audiences, it succeeded at emptying Zionism of its meaning as a national liberation movement of the Jewish people and associating it instead with racism, fascism, Nazism, genocide, imperialism, colonialism, militarism and apartheid. It contributed to the adoption of the notorious 1975 UN General Assembly Resolution 3379, which held Zionism to be a form of racism and paved the way for the demonisation of Israel within that organisation.

In the course of the campaign, hundreds of anti-Zionist and anti-Israel books and



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Thousands of articles were published in the USSR, with millions of copies entering circulation in the country. Many were translated into foreign languages – English, French, German, Spanish, Arabic and numerous others. In 1970 alone, the comparison between alleged Zionist and Nazi racism – just one of the campaign's numerous memes – merited 96 mentions (Pinkus 1989:256). Demonisation of Zionism continued in films, lectures, and radio broadcasts. [Anti-Zionist cartoons](#), many of an obvious antisemitic nature, were a regular feature of Soviet publications.

The campaign used the significant Soviet broadcasting abroad, as well as front organisations and friendly con- organisations in the West and third world countries to reach foreign audiences. The U.S. [State Department](#) viewed it as an important tool within that campaign, one that it classified as part of its arsenal of 'active measures' – 'covert or deceptive operations' – of Soviet foreign policy.

The antisemitic nature of this campaign was appalling. Many contributing content- many of whom had direct links to the leadership – relied heavily on antisemitic tropes [borrowed from the Protocols of the Elders of Zion](#). Some in the group were Nazis and used *Mein Kampf* as both a [source of inspiration](#) for their own interpretations.

The Soviets vehemently rejected accusations of antisemitism, calling them 'Zionist tricks' and 'nefarious imperialist scheming.' But Jews knew better. In 1976, during one of the peaks of the campaign, Jewish activist Natan Sharansky said that he sensed '[the smell of pogrom](#)' in the air.

Virulently antisemitic anti-Zionism that was so central to the late Soviet Union's propaganda seems to have faded from the West's collective memory. Yet, in a strange case of *déjà vu* for those who, like myself, have lived through the late Soviet anti-Zionist campaign or have studied it in detail, the same memes and ideas that were in use then continue to circulate in contemporary far-left anti-Zionist circles.

Political cartoons equating Israel with Nazi Germany that might as well have been lifted from Soviet newspapers have appeared on mainstream [progressive blogs](#). One-time London mayor and prominent member of the Labor party Ken Livingstone [has claimed](#) that 'Hitler was supporting Zionism before he went mad and ended up killing six million Jews.' Lenni Brenner's 1983 [anti-Zionist classic](#) *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* is built around supposed Nazi-Zionist equivalency. References to Zionism and Israel as racist, imperialist, colonial, genocidal and apartheid abound in contemporary far-left discourse. The anti-Zionist discourse of the UK Labour Party, which is part and parcel of its current crisis over antisemitism, is replete with the same memes.



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The similarity begs the question of the ideological origins of this discourse. Just as it is important to understand the ideological heritage of the far-right's antisemitic rhetoric, it is important to wrap our heads around the origins of the far-left's anti-Zionist discourse, particularly where it intersects with antisemitism. We can begin by re-examining what historian Jeffrey Herf calls 'the toxic ideological brew' that the communist anti-Zionist and anti-Israel campaigns left behind (Herf 2016, p. 461).

'INTERNATIONAL ZIONISM' AS A WORLDWIDE DESTROY SOCIALISM AND SPREAD IMPERIALISM

The idea of Zionism as a hostile ideology began to solidify in the USSR in the late 1940s, once it became clear that Israel was in the 'imperialist camp' rather than the Soviet Union. Allegations of 'international Zionism' became a prominent feature of Stalinist purge trials. The trials featured the idea of 'international Zionism' as a worldwide conspiracy to destroy socialism. Manufactured by the Soviet secret services, 'international Zionism', Israel, Jewish leaders, and American imperialism were all lumped into 'Zionist' into dangerous labels that could be used against anyone. The trial opened the door to [vicious antisemitism](#).

Over the following decade, the Soviet press continued to spread the idea. It received an extra boost with the [trial of Adolf Eichmann](#) in 1961, where the Soviets were determined to undermine the legitimacy of the trial. The Holocaust challenged their concept of Slavic victimhood, so to do so was to attack Israel's diplomatic relationship with West Germany, which the Soviets painted as a 'fascist' heir of Nazi Germany.

The 'obvious' conclusion was that Zionism was a natural bedfellow with fascists and Nazis. Drawing this parallel allowed the Soviets to tap into a visceral sentiment. For the Soviet people, whose sacrifice in World War II was enormous, fascism and Nazism represented the greatest evil imaginable. By equalising Zionism with these two, Soviet propaganda architects sought to create a visceral reaction – of a kind that didn't depend on fact but on a deep feeling.

By the 1960s, the Soviets' anti-Zionist propaganda arsenal widened courtesy of a book, *Judaism without Embellishments* by Trofim Kichko. A deeply antisemitic tract featuring [Der Stürmer-like cartoons](#), it proposed that Judaism, with its concept of Jews as a chosen people, was an inherently racist religion and linked to American imperialism and Israeli colonialism. One of the cartoons showed a stereotypical Jewish capitalist licking a boot with a swastika painted on it.

The book initially generated [a storm of indignation](#), including from foreign leftist groups, and the Soviets disavowed it – but only temporarily. In the following years,

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Kichko became one of the key authors contributing to the massive volume of anti-Zionist propaganda.

Beside the ongoing advancement of the alleged Nazi-Zionist connection, his book introduced an idea that Soviet propagandists would use repeatedly in the coming decades: that Zionism was an outgrowth of Judaism and as such asserted Jewish racial superiority. The Soviets would use this line repeatedly over the years, [including at the UN](#), as they worked toward the adoption of the 1948 UN Partition Plan for Palestine.

THE TURNING POINT: THE SIX-DAY WAR OF 1967

It was the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, however, that really changed the course of Zionist campaigning. For Moscow, which had supported the Arabs, was a crushing defeat, handing a clear ideological victory to the Zionists. At home, Israel's victory served as the catalyst for a new wave of anti-Semitism among Soviet Jews. All of a sudden, the old enemy – international Jewry – seemed to be rearing its head. The Soviet leadership needed to help shape public opinion at home and abroad.

On August 7, 1967, an article titled 'What Is Zionism?' appeared in several Soviet publications. Its author, Yuri Ivanov, an [Central Committee apparatus](#) who would go on to become a leading anti-Zionist writer, took his clue from age-old tropes of Jewish influence: he presented Zionism as a centrally-controlled system that gripped the entirety of global politics, finance and the media, had unlimited resources, and sought to establish monopolistic control over the entire world.

Similar articles followed, including one by Kichko, now back in favor. In 1968 he [produced a new book](#), *Judaism and Zionism*. Building on his original ideas, he [blamed](#) Judaism for the 'crimes' of Israeli 'aggressors.' 'There is a direct connection between the morality of Judaism and the actions of the Israeli Zionists,' wrote Kichko. 'Weren't the actions of the Israeli extremists during their latest aggression against the Arab countries in keeping with the Torah?'

Kichko's book was one of many Soviet publications that attempted to show that the evils of Zionism could be traced back to Judaism. Judaism had always been the *bête noir* of the Soviet struggle against religion, and it was persecuted with particular harshness. Even as a few synagogues continued to function into the 1970s and 1980s, the study of Hebrew was prohibited, and so was the training of the next generation of clergy, indicating that the Soviet leadership had clearly marked Judaism for extinction. The problem was that to paint every aspect of Jewish religion and tradition in black, rendered Soviet claims that they were not antisemitic but simply anti-Zionist meaningless.

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simply anti-Zionist, meaningless.

Next in the line of prominent Soviet anti-Zionist texts came Ivanov's *Caution: Zionism!* The state-owned press greeted the 1969 book with rave reviews. The initial 70,000 print run was followed by three additional re-printings. Moving into the early years of the 1970s, hundreds of thousands of copies were put into circulation. The book was translated into sixteen languages and became one of Soviet anti-Zionism's foundational texts. It described Zionists as representative of colonialist-imperialist powers, hostile toward the working people and with an insatiable thirst for power. It portrayed Judaism as the religion, one that had spawned the world's most vicious connection between Zionism and fascism received due credit. The idea that 'Israeli militarism and West German neo-Nazi source.'

Like Kichko before him, Ivanov devoted ample space to Jews as a 'chosen people,' which, he showed, demonstrated the underpinnings of Zionism. He also took time to discuss the nation. He called the idea a Zionist invention that was 'without content': this notion, he claimed, had prevented Jews from integrating into their host nations, promoted a ghetto mentality, and consequently provoked antisemitism.

Some of these ideas could be traced back to the early 19th-century Jewish question, but in the new environment, they had a new life. In Ivanov's book, the Soviet ideologists were sending the message: assimilate or be viewed as adherents of the most racist, reactionary, and genocidal religion and ideology on the planet—and suffer the consequences.

The book came out at a crucial time. The Six Day War led to a national awakening among Soviet Jews. Growing awareness of the tragedy of the Holocaust (the Soviets had sought to internally suppress information, in particular, about the Jewish aspects of Hitler's war) was strengthening the Soviet Jewry's Jewish identity. As the Soviet regime's antisemitic rhetoric intensified, more Soviet Jews began to reach out to the United States and Israel for help. Arrests and trials on charges of Zionist activity began. In 1970, a group of 16 refuseniks attempted to hijack an empty plane to fly it to freedom. They were arrested before they even got to the plane. The harsh sentences that the group received – including two death sentences, later commuted as a result of an international outcry – drew attention abroad to their plight. The campaign for Soviet Jewry began to gather steam in the West.

Inside the country, the increasingly antisemitic anti-Zionist campaign continued unabated. Ivanov and Kichko were among a dozen or so primary anti-Zionist ideologues who throughout the campaign's twenty year span produced some fifty

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books, with nine million copies in circulation, propagating ‘[paranoid, conspiratorial](#)’ anti-Zionism mixed with antisemitic, xenophobic, and ultra-nationalist messages, combined with anti-capitalist and anti-Western rhetoric,’ wrote historian Andreas Umland. Titles included *Fascism under a Blue Star*, which compared Zionism to fascism; *De-Zionization* (this one was translated into Arabic and [published in Syria](#) in 1979 on Hafez al-Assad’s direction); and *Zionism and Apartheid*, a deeply antisemitic tractate whose author was a [fan of Nazi ideology](#) and borrowed for his writings directly from *Mein Kampf*.

SOVIET JEWRY AND THE NAZI ANALOGY

In 1983, two new books from the same genre received to the US Jewish organisations engaged in the campaign, called *On the Course of Aggression and Fascism*. It detailed a ‘[criminal alliance with the Fascists](#)’ and blamed the Zion non-Zionist Jews during the Holocaust. The second, titled *Zionism*, [declared Jews](#) a ‘fifth column in any country.’ It was written by a notorious antisemite with a doctoral degree Lev E. Kuperman, so egregious as to prompt an unexpected act of [personnel](#) by a Soviet scholar. In the oppressive climate of the early 1980s, no one followed in his steps.

Each book publication spawned endless reviews and articles for different audiences, including the military, party functionaries, and youth. The Academy played an important role in lending credibility through its ‘scholarly’ articles. Reporting on this output, the [Washington Post](#) observed in 1979: ‘Soviet bureaucrats vehemently reject suggestions that “anti-Zionism” means “anti-Semitism.” But to many Soviet Jews, it is a distinction without a difference.’

The campaign did not rely on printed word alone. The Soviets produced several documentaries to support the campaign. One was called *The Concealed and the Apparent: Goals and Actions of the Zionists*. With its manipulation of historical footage, deeply antisemitic imagery, and parallels between Zionism and Nazism, it was deemed so inflammatory as to be limited to selected audiences. Although it was never released to the broader public, the film, which is today [available online](#), serves as a stark visual testimony to the deep connections between Soviet-style anti-Zionism and antisemitism.

What drove this campaign was the Soviets’ apparent belief that a vast Zionist conspiracy did, in fact, exist, and that this campaign aimed at undermining the Soviet Union and socialism itself. The more the West criticised the Soviet human rights record and its treatment of its Jewish minority, and the more the Soviet Jewry expressed a demand to emigrate, the more the authorities felt confirmed in their



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belief, and [the more the campaign intensified](#).

The authorities engaged numerous resources to discredit the very idea of emigration. They claimed that those who had done so experienced nothing but misery abroad and were begging to come back. For foreign audiences, the message was that discrimination against their Jewish citizens was fiction, and that Soviet Jews had no desire to leave their motherland. Geared at English-speaking foreign audiences in particular were English-language booklets published by the same Novosti Publishing House that distributed other Soviet propaganda abroad. Their titles spoke for themselves: *Soviet Jews: A Testimony*; *Testify: Concerning the Plight of Immigrants in Israel*; and

By the mid-1970s the KGB felt the Zionist threat was serious enough to be establishing a special department to focus specifically on the Jewish diaspora. Jewish organisations were viewed as a particularly important part of the Soviet Zionist conspiracy. The Soviets believed the international movement of Soviet Jewry to be a cynical manipulation manufactured to give a black eye to the Soviet image abroad and meddle in foreign affairs. Countless articles were devoted to discrediting the movement. Investigative journalist Ronen Bergman, the Soviet secretary of the organisations involved in the movement by discrediting them to sow discord and confusion.

By the early 1980s, US-Soviet relations were hitting a low point as demands were surging. The newly created Anti-Zionist Committee of the Soviet Public provided the much-needed propagandistic boost, producing brochures and delivering press conferences on the evils of Israel and Zionism, including for foreign audiences. In a 1983 *Pravda* article [announcing the launch](#) of the Committee, its members declared Zionism a concentration of ‘extreme nationalism, chauvinism, and racial intolerance, justification of territorial seizure and annexation, armed adventurism, a cult of political arbitrariness and impunity, demagoguery and ideological sabotage, sordid maneuvers and perfidy.’ A 1985 TASS [broadcast](#) commenting on one of the committee’s English-language brochures announced: ‘Zionist leaders are responsible for the deaths of thousands of Jews annihilated by the Nazis. It is precisely the Zionists who assisted the Nazi butchers by helping them to make up the lists of the doomed inmates of ghettos, escorting the latter to the places of extermination and convinced them to resign to the butchers.’

GLOBAL POLITICAL WARFARE

The Soviets didn’t limit themselves to fighting Zionism within their borders. An enemy such as this one had to be fought on multiple fronts, including through information warfare abroad. Here at their disposal was a powerful state-owned media apparatus whose goal was to ‘spread the truth about the USSR in all the



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media apparatus whose goal was to 'spread the truth about the USSR in all the continents' (Hazan 2017, p. 49). It published numerous newspapers and magazines with a combined circulation of tens of millions of copies per year in English, German, Spanish, Hindi, French, Arabic, and other languages. Radio Moscow broadcast more than 1,000 hours per week, in eighty languages, to Europe, the Middle East, North and sub-Saharan Africa, and the Americas. The Soviet Union's main foreign broadcasting arm and primary carrier of foreign propaganda, the Novosti Press Agency, worked in over 110 countries. One of its tasks was to build relations with the local press (Hazan 2017: 31, 34-61). Societies were established by the Soviets abroad as well as radio stations designed to promote Soviet international interests, much of it in the form of propaganda support (Hazan 2017: 103-14).

The Soviet relationships with the local media meant that the Soviet outlets, whenever necessary, to inject prefabricated information of a disinformation nature into the global news stream. Novosti and disseminate them throughout their network (Hazan 2017: 34-61). That the Soviets scored one of their biggest Cold War propaganda victories in getting the CBS television anchor Dan Rather to broadcast a version of a KGB-fabricated story of American scientists plotting to kill African-Americans and gay people.

The Soviets structured their foreign anti-Zionist message around specific foreign policy priorities for that country or audience. 'Zionism, of a bugaboo,' Israeli historian Nati Cantorovich told me. 'It was a bugaboo in South African apartheid and Zionism. In Latin America, it was imperialism and Zionism. In Asia, it was Japanese revanchism and Zionism.'

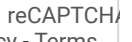
In 1970, for example, *Soviet Weekly*, a Soviet English-language outlet that targeted the United Kingdom, reprinted, in four consecutive issues, an article that defined Zionism as 'not so much the Jewish nationalist movement it used to be but an organic part of the international – primarily American – imperialist machinery for the carrying out of neocolonialist policies and ideological subversion' (Hazan 2017: 150). In 1977 the same publication printed a piece titled 'Why We Condemn Zionism,' which proclaimed Zionism to be a racist doctrine and characterised Israelis as 'worthy heirs to Hitler's National-Socialism' (Wistrich 2012: loc 5882). Several Africa programs, in English, French, and Portuguese, broadcast on the same day in 1973, claimed that Zionism had 'an ideological affinity with South African racism' and was 'part of the global strategy of imperialism aimed against the liberation movements' (Hazan 2017: 152).

Numerous Soviet anti-Zionist books were translated and distributed abroad. According to the Israeli investigative reporter, Bergman, the 1979 Soviet anti-Zionist tractate titled *The White Book*, was distributed to a variety of audiences in thirty-two



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countries, including US and Canadian Communist Party leaders, 'parliament members, ministers and social activists from different countries, libraries, as well as representatives of international organisations, libraries, and higher education institutions.' Among the English-language propaganda brochures published by Novosti were: *Zionism: Instrument of Imperialist Reaction*, *Soviet Opinion on Events in the Middle East and the Adventures of International Zionism*, and *Anti-Sovietism – Profession of Zionists, Zionism Counts on Terror* and others.

Senior members of the Anti-Zionist Committee of the published articles in foreign press and addressed foreign committee, General David Dragunsky, took part in Soviet broadcasts directed at Israel. In October 1983 he appeared to boast of the Committee's successes and to claim that it was receiving broad support from outside the USSR, including the audiences of the Committee's close relationship with Syria. Syria was one of the most militantly anti-Zionist in the Middle East, and the Soviet-Syrian friendship treaty of 1972 made Zionism a common enemy. In conveying his anti-Zionist views to Soviet audiences, Dragunsky was lending a helping hand to Soviet propaganda vis-à-vis the country (Korey 1989:35).

Arab-language anti-Zionist literature was an important part of the propaganda directed at the Middle East. According to Bergman, it was mentioned in Mahmoud Abbas's 1982 Ph.D. dissertation. In the early 1980s, at Moscow's Patrice Lumumba University, a school established to train World elites in Marxism-Leninism and prepare them to become

influencers (Hazan 2017: 87-88). He defended his dissertation at Moscow's Institute of Oriental Studies – an important institution within the Academy of Sciences, which regularly churned out 'scholarly' works demonizing Zionism and Israel. During Abbas's tenure, the Institute was headed by Yevgeny Primakov, an Arabist with [lifelong connections](#) to Soviet intelligence in the Middle East, who would eventually head the Soviet foreign intelligence agency SVR. That Primakov [personally appointed](#) Abbas's dissertation advisor shows the importance that the Soviet foreign policy and intelligence establishments attached to the educational output of this already prominent Palestinian leader.

Abbas's dissertation was published as a book in 2011 in Arabic under the title *The Other Side: The Secret Relationship between Nazism and Zionism*. Several passages from the book [reproduced](#) in Bergman's article, replicate some of the mainstays of the Soviet anti-Zionist campaign, including those concerning the alleged Zionist collaboration with the Nazis during the Holocaust and casting doubt on the number of Holocaust victims.

A particularly curious piece of historical falsification that made it into Abbas's book



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concerned Adolf Eichmann's capture by the Mossad. According to Bergman, Abbas wrote that the Mossad abducted Eichmann in order to prevent the high-ranking Nazi from revealing the secret of Zionists' role in the Final Solution.

Strikingly, the very same piece of fabrication was employed by a member of the Anti-Zionist Committee of the Soviet Public at a press conference in Moscow in June 1983. At the event, Yuri Kolesnikov, author of numerous works demonising Zionism and Israel, [claimed](#) that during the war the Zionists were 'in league with the Gestapo and SS' and that the Israelis executed Eichmann to prevent the disclosure of "sacred secrets" of this collaboration from becoming public. The same provocation by these two individuals, who share the same propaganda and intelligence structures, shows that the Mossad is the source for their anti-Zionist claims.

THE TOXIC LEGACIES OF SOVIET ANTISEMITIC AGENDAS

We have yet to understand fully how Soviet anti-Zionism influenced the world. In those individual instances where this influence was felt, just how negatively it impacted the lives of Jews around the world.

One instance of such influence is documented in David Rich's *Problem: Jeremy Corbyn, Israel and Anti-Semitism*. Rich discusses the 'Zionism Is Racism' resolution by the UN – an effort to delegitimise – promoting – opened the door for British Students' Unions to support and funding of Jewish societies on campuses or even to

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The logic was simple: the UN has ascertained that Zionism is racism; Jewish societies declare their support for Israel; ergo Jewish societies are racist and cannot be tolerated on campus. British Student Unions 'mostly did this for honorable anti-racist reasons, but in doing so they discovered something disturbing,' writes Rich. 'When you use the "Zionism is racism" idea as the basis for practical politics, you can end up with an antisemitic campaign' (Rich 2016).

In July 1990, less than a year before the USSR fell apart, [Pravda published an editorial](#) admitting to the wrongs of the anti-Zionist campaign of the previous quarter century. 'Considerable damage was done by a group of authors who, while pretending to fight Zionism, began to resurrect many notions of the antisemitic propaganda of the Black Hundreds and of fascist origin,' it read. 'Hiding under Marxist phraseology, they came out with coarse attacks on Jewish culture, on Judaism and on Jews in general.' But the damage inflicted by the two decades of the campaign could not be undone with a single editorial. A 1990 Soviet poll showed that a significant percentage of Soviet citizens [thought](#) that Zionism was 'the policy of establishing the world supremacy of Jews' and an 'ideology used to justify Israeli aggression in the Middle East.'

Among the organisations that had risen to prominence as perestroika lifted controls over civil society were the virulently anti-Semitic Pamyat (Memory) and Otechestvo (Homeland), which blended fascist and neo-Nazi ideas with a particular form of Russian ethnic ultranationalism. *Some of their leaders were the same ideologues who had manufactured the Soviet anti-Zionist campaign.* In the summer of 1988, as the Russian Orthodox Church prepared to celebrate the millennium of Christianity, [rumors of impending pogroms](#) sent the country's Jews left the country in the following decade.

CONCLUSION: 'WHEREVER AND WHENEVER THE ANTI-ZIONIST CAMPAIGN WAS USED FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES, ANTISEMITISM BLOSSOMED'

One of the lessons that the late Soviet anti-Zionist campaign taught is that anti-Zionism and antisemitism have historically been deeply intertwined. True to their ideological tenets, the Soviets used purely racist terms. Accused of antisemitism, they indeed were simply anti-Zionist. But wherever and whenever anti-Zionism was used for their political purposes, antisemitism blossomed.

Examples of other countries further prove this point. The Soviet anti-Zionist campaign quickly degenerated into [an antisemitic witch hunt](#), with expulsions and forced emigration of some 15,000 Jews. In 2017, the US Women's March revealed crude antisemitism by its organisers. UK Labour's overt anti-Zionism has [most recently by this publication](#) – to have been a cover for vulgar, racist antisemitic sentiments.

Today, as some of the [leading opinion-makers](#) on the left are seeking to build consensus around the idea that anti-Zionism and antisemitism are not the same, understanding this history is vitally important. As I have written [elsewhere](#), claiming that anti-Zionism and antisemitism are not the same may make for an interesting intellectual exercise. What happens in practice is another matter.

At its core, the Soviet anti-Zionist campaign of 1967-1988 was a campaign of propaganda and disinformation. It built and weaponised narratives based on made-up or twisted facts. It distorted history. It employed classic propaganda tools such as deception, guilt by association, and repetition to inculcate the key messages. It shamelessly played on people's sentiments, and it used both Soviet Jews and Muslims as instruments of propaganda (Hazan 2017: 230-93).

Despite its claims, the Soviet anti-Zionist campaign was hardly motivated by a search for justice, peace or liberation for the Palestinian people. Conceived by master propagandists, it was an instrument whose primary purpose was to divert attention

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master propagandists, it was an instrument whose purpose was to divert attention, manipulate, solidify control, purge enemies, and broaden influence for one of the most oppressive regimes in humanity's history.

A particular trick of Soviet anti-Zionism, according to the Israeli historian Kiril Feferman, was that it 'proposed a version of antisemitism to Western audiences that did not have obvious antisemitic overtones.' It did so by substituting anti-Zionism for antisemitism in its propaganda, which made it passable for the many well-intentioned, idealistic individuals who otherwise would have been repelled by this rhetoric. Yet, underneath the relatively benign campaign packed a powerful antisemitic charge.

The messaging emanating from today's far-left anti-Zionism is very similar to the messaging of the Soviet anti-Zionist campaign. It draws on Zionist collaboration with the Nazis in the Holocaust, the inherently racist and oppressive ideology, to the concept of a colonialist state that engages in genocidal behavior and that were part and parcel of the Soviet anti-Zionist narrative.

More research is needed to shed light on the trajectory of the late Soviet anti-Zionist campaign brought forth. So, from the tsarist *Protocols* and Hitler's Nazi propaganda; to the Marxist-Leninist framework; and ended up fertilising Russian ultranationalism. Did its ideological precepts and its view of Zionism and Israel? If so, to what extent have those ideas have outlived the system that produced them? It is to find a crucial missing link in our understanding of contemporary left antisemitism.

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